

National Qualifications Framework Operation Plan for the Promotion of Lifelong Skill Development

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1. Overview

Current National Qualifications Framework (NQF) has become a global phenomenon as it has been implemented or is under the process of implementation in more than 155 nations. As South Korea is also one of the nations that prepare for NQF implementation, it is going under the process of NQF implementation as a part of government project to ‘create a competence based society, not on academic clique’. Therefore, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Employment and Labor are planning to build up NQF, ultimately until 2017, through demonstration projects by establishing ‘Basic Plan of National Qualifications Framework (2013.12)’.

However, even though the purpose of NQF is respectable, if it is difficult to be absorbed by existing system or has some implementation limit, it is considered that its original policy goal cannot be fully achieved. Therefore, it is required to have systematic examination and analysis about the foundation for NQF and the existing system.

2. Major Result of the Research

In this research, analysis standard of NQF implementation foundation was set up based on a guide suggested by ILO for NQF construction of various nations, foreign cases including standard utilized to implement NQF on individual nation as NQF in European Union and researches about national Competence Accreditation Framework status. Through this, the research identified if South Korea has a foundation to implement NQF and suggested what policy sectors need to be practically implemented by priority. The analysis outcome of each analysis section is as follows.

① Adequacy of NQF Operation Purpose

In 'Basic Construction Plan of National Qualifications Framework (2013.12)' that is currently being carried out, the main purpose of NQF operation is on changing academic ability oriented society to competence oriented society by activating functions that corresponds to or that can replace academic ability such as qualification, the competence accreditation mechanism and field experiences as labor market only accredits academic accreditation even though it was supposed to accredit individual's competence in various ways to create competence oriented society.

But there are difficulties in explaining reasons to replace academic ability by qualification or field experience and it seems preparing for consistent remedies based on this has restrictions as well. Besides, it is believed that academic ability can be replaced simply by showing equivalency of academic ability, qualification and field experience through NQF, but it is determined that it requires improvement as it can send wrong signal of possibility in various goals achievement in NQF implementation only with NQF construction.

② Adequacy of NQF Level and Level Descriptor

In various cases of other nations which implemented NQF, a method in South Korea, making qualifications in various fields as a trial without confirmed advance NQF level and level descriptor and ultimately integrating to confirm, is an unprecedented method in history.

As such method to confirm NQF level system and level descriptor after trial operations is restricting systematic and efficient NQF construction, it is determined to require appropriate rectification.

③ Adequacy of NQF Governance

The plan was arranged with the participation of concerned government ministry and some experts in the process of establishing 'Basic Plan of National Qualifications Framework (2013.12)', but in future plan establishment and NQF frame build up processes, various parties concerned including government ministry that manages qualifications, sector-based, level-based education training institutions, qualification examination institutions, representatives of industrial fields and labor fields need to be able to participate in major decision making processes related to NQF.

Besides, constitution of supervising organization that sets up the level of NQF and decides level-based qualification placement is required and NQF supervising organization needs to be constituted as a form of committee with people who represent parties concerned related to NQF operation by following the cases of other nations.

④ Adequacy of Qualification Management

An educational system, a training system, a qualification system and an academic credit approval system which provide qualifications after secondary education such as an academic degree, a graduation certificate, a license and some other educational qualification are regulated by government ministry that supervises individual related sectors. Also, Institutions that represent or manage the supervising institutions have such systems except secondary education and postgraduate education.

However, Korean Council for College Education and Korean Council for University Education which represent colleges and universities have main functions limited to carry out duties such as research development, material supply and training provision to represent or support member universities' stance. Therefore, practically, they do not directly supervise the standard and the quality of high school education. Thus, it is required to secure a measure to be actively involved and manage the quality of academic certificates issued by concerned high school education institutions.

⑤ Operation Status of Outcome-based Qualification System

Among the fields currently being examined for NQF implementation, there is no field with detailed outcome-based examination standard (or purpose of educational training) and examination content (or content of educational training) except National Technical Qualification and Vocational Training fields. Although some parts of subject for education and educational content are stated in educational purpose of schools regulated by 「Elementary and Secondary Education Act」 and 「Higher Education Act」, the purposes are not stated in detailed to be analyzed by future NQF level-based descriptor.

With all points considered, the purpose of education regulated by current 「Elementary and Secondary Education Act」 and 「Higher Education Act」 need to be appropriately concretized for NQF level-based descriptor, and by complementing conditions for graduation that merely emphasizes on quantity

of education such as school hours or credits, a task needs to be carried out to reflect educational content that are required to be completed mandatorily on an educational course. With this, it was also revealed that implementation of course based qualification system requires expansion to carry out practical outcome-based evaluation.

⑥ Potentiality of NQF Level System Comparison

In terms of partial qualification of general education and higher education without NCS implementation, materials to verify the levels need to be submitted such as job analysis materials, job status materials and level setup materials which established the educational training course, but it was determined that the preparation was insufficient. Especially, in case of secondary education, it can be replaced through examination of educational course content as national level educational course is being implemented. But in case of higher education, there is no specified standard that comprises educational content and it is being decided by teachers in higher educational institutions depending on their personal competence. Therefore, it is difficult to verify if students who obtained a same academic degree practically have the same competence. Such points show that the purpose of education ambiguously stated in 「Higher Education Act」 needs to be concretized by referring to the NQF level-based descriptor.

3. The Policy Proposal

The policy proposal related to NQF Basic Construction and Qualification Improvement including NQF based on the results of NQF Operation foundation analysis can be suggested as follow.

[Proposal 1] Reassessment on NQF operation purpose is required.

NQF that is currently being carried out is one of the sub-partial projects in national project to 'create a competence based society, not on academic clique'. As it can be seen in cases of other nations which implemented NQF, a purpose to make information of qualification transparent through NQF and construct an efficient competence accreditation system through relations among qualifications can also become one of the major purposes of NQF operation.

But current situation on qualification system in South Korea has a fundamental problem that needs to be solved prior to mutual compatibility

problem of academic ability, qualification and field experience, and that is to say the problem of utility deficiency of academic ability and qualification. Therefore, it is required to have reassessment on detailed diagnosis of the problem and NQF operation purpose.

[Proposal 2] First of all, NQF level and level-based descriptor need to be confirmed and declared.

Current NQF construction plan is being processed under the idea of performing a number of NQF trial operations and ultimately forming NQF frame by integrating them. But nations which implemented NQF like Australia or preparing NQF like Germany, even though there are differences in its format, firstly confirm NQF level and level-based descriptor through the advance researches and negotiations among parties concerned, and then arrange a preexisting qualification as a trial or make a new qualification to see if such level and descriptor are appropriate.

Therefore, the government firstly needs to confirm and declare NQF level and level-based descriptor in Korea by going through advance research results, cases of major countries and holding a public hearing with parties concerned, and then based on this, carry out the improvement plan of trial operations and preexisting qualification related system.

[Proposal 3] The constitution of NQF supervision organization is required.

Although NQF implementation was stated in national project and the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Employment and Labor jointly completed the basic plan for implementation, the practical sub-partial plan is being processed in different departments or institutions and therefore, it limits the overall NQF plan and promotion. It must be because qualifications and educational training system related to NQF are difficult to be controlled by few government departments.

But to prepare for a consistent national NQF, the constitution of an organization to gather and guide diverse concerned parties such as various government departments, qualification management institutions, industrial fields, labor fields and educational training field is needed. Besides, such organization can be easily found in the cases of major countries which operate NQF and therefore, such constitution of NQF supervision organization needs to be promoted by priority for systematic and efficient NQF implementation and operation.

[Proposal 4] Concerned qualification quality management functions of NQF included qualification sectorial representative organization or management organization need to be consolidated.

As a result of examining organizations which directly manage and represent educational system, training system, qualification system and academic credit approval system in NOF related qualification operation status analyzed above, it seems the function of current organization has some limits to maintain and improve the quality of concerned qualification even if academic ability and qualification of such sectors are included in NQF.

Therefore, to make the organizations directly responsible, manage and improve the quality of concerned qualification, additional evaluation about level management and operation organization of qualification is also needs to be assigned.

[Proposal 5] An educational purpose of individual schools in 「Elementary and Secondary Education Act」 and 「Higher Education Act」 needs to be concretized by following NQF level-based descriptor.

With the educational purpose of individual schools currently regulated in 「Elementary and Secondary Education Act」 and 「Higher Education Act」, it is difficult to explain a level of specific academic ability accurately. Therefore, when NQF level-based descriptor is developed, the educational purpose of individual schools in the relevant legislation needs to be concretized accordingly.

Such measure to adjust specific academic ability to NQF definition by law will be a first step to improve the academic ability to become outcome-based ability. Besides, such legal regulation can become a basic regulation to organizations which manage specific academic ability to set up a detailed management standard.

[Proposal 6] Qualifications with NCS implementation difficulty also need to be fulfilled with regulation of result- oriented qualification setup.

Educational training and qualification sectors being improved with the foundation of current NCS are measured to have less difficulty in determining NQF inclusion status as NCS itself is constituted with outcome-based features that reflect industrial field.

However, considerable portion of fields where NCS is not developed or qualifications of fields with NCS implementation difficulty can also be included in NQF to enhance human resource development and efficiency of qualification. In such cases, an organization that manages the qualification concerned needs to have basic qualification setup and explanation materials of job specifications in advance that follow NCS. It is because when it is desired to be included in NQF without the basic, the discussion needs to be performed in a political form which can lead to declination of NQF reliability.